

〔研究ノート〕

Against the Treatment of WH-*the Hell* Phrases as Polarity Items: with Special Reference to WH-*If Any*

OGURO, Takeshi

0. Introduction

Since Pesetsky's (1987) interesting typology of WH-phrases in terms related to discourse, WH-*the hell* phrases such as *who the hell* and *what the hell* have attracted attention in the literature of generative grammar. One of the important studies on such elements is carried out in Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002). They argue that these phrases are polarity items like *any*, a property from which they derive the peculiarities of WH-*the hell* phrases. In this paper, I attempt to examine their analysis by employing examples involving WH-*if any* sequences like *who if anyone* and *what if anything* and to show that Den Dikken and Giannakidou's analysis of WH-*the hell* phrases is observationally inadequate.

This paper is organized as follows. The first section sketches the two basic properties of WH-*the hell* phrases originally discussed by Pesetsky (1987). The second section outlines Den Dikken and Giannakidou's approach to WH-*the hell* phrases, according to which such phrases should be treated like polarity items. The third section offers examples containing WH-*if any* sequences, which can also be regarded as involving polarity items, and I argue that the treatment of WH-*the hell* phrases as polarity items is undesirable. The fourth section suggests that these phrases are in fact presuppositional. The final section concludes the paper.

1. The Basic Properties of WH-*the Hell* Phrases

Pesetsky (1987) introduces an intriguing typology of WH-phrases which concerns the availability of potential answers in prior discourse. He argues that there are certain WH-phrases for which appropriate answers are limited to a set of candidates preestablished in discourse. He refers to those phrases as discourse-linked (hereafter D-linked) phrases, representative cases being *which*-phrases. Phrases like *who* and *what* are usually not subject to such a restriction on possible candidates for answers, so they are in many cases not D-linked. He introduces another kind of WH-phrase with regard to what kind of items qualify as felicitous answers. He shows that there are WH-phrases which have no list of appropriate answers for them and speakers who employ them do not have a clue as to what the answer could be. These phrases are termed "aggressively" non-D-linked WH-phrases, which are

represented by phrases such as *who the hell* and *what the hell*. Pesetsky observes that these WH-*the hell* phrases behave quite differently from other “normal” WH-phrases. Here are two major aberrations that separate them from others.

1.1 The Incompatibility with Which

One of the most peculiar things regarding *the hell* is that it cannot go together with *which*:

- (1) a. What the hell book did you read that in?
 - b. *Which the hell book did you read that in?
- (Pesetsky (1987: 111))

As the contrast above shows, *which*, unlike *what*, cannot be accompanied by *the hell*. This is straightforward, since the bad (b) example involves at the same time an occurrence of *which*, a typical D-linked element, and *the hell*, a sign of non-D-linkability, a clear contradiction.

1.2 The Failure to Remain in Situ

One other thing that is abnormal about WH-*the hell* phrases is that they strongly refuse to stay in situ:

- (2) a. Who caught what?
 - b. *Who caught what the hell?
- (Pesetsky (1987: 125))
- (3) a. Who read what?
 - b. *Who read what the hell?
- (Lasnik and Saito (1992: 173))

Argument WH-phrases like *what* can normally stay in situ, but they fail to do so when they have *the hell* accompany them.

2. WH-*the Hell* Phrases as Polarity Items

Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002) offer a novel account for the behavior of WH-*the hell* phrases. Contrary to the well known view of WH-phrases as behaving like existential quantifiers in interrogative contexts^[1] (dating back to studies such as Katz and Postal (1964) and Chomsky (1964)) or as acting like universal quantifiers in *no matter* clauses (Nishigauchi (1990)) and in multiple interrogatives when they

undergo movement and occupy [Spec, CP] (Kiss (1993) and Comorovski (1996)), these authors claim that WH-*the hell* phrases should be treated as polarity items like *any*. Here is the gist of their approach.

One striking piece of motivation to assimilate WH-*the hell* phrases to polarity items like *any* comes from the distribution of WH-phrases and WH-*the hell* phrases in the complement of verbs like *know*. Consider the following paradigm:

- (4) a. I know who would buy the book.
- b. *I know who the hell would buy the book.
(Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 33))
- (5) a. I don't know who would buy the book.
- b. I don't know who the hell would buy the book.
(Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 33))

As shown above, WH-*the hell* phrases, unlike regular WH-phrases, are not allowed to be in the complement of *know*, unless the verb is negated.

What happens here is not caused by some exceptional property of this particular verb. This pattern can be found with other verbs:

- (6) a. He {told me/confirmed/realized} who had spread those horrible rumors about me.
- b. *He {told me/confirmed/realized} who the hell had spread those horrible rumors about me.
(Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 34))
- (7) a. He didn't {tell me/confirm/realize} who had spread those horrible rumors about me.
- b. He didn't {tell me/confirm/realize} who the hell had spread those horrible rumors about me.
(Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 34))

Interestingly, this is also what we find with *any*. Observe the following:

- (8) a. *John knew that Martha bought any book.
- b. John didn't know that Martha bought any book.
(Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 34))
- (9) a. *He told me that anyone was spreading those horrible rumors about me.
- b. He didn't tell me that anyone was spreading those horrible rumors about me.
(Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 34))

It is suggested in the literature that these verbs are veridical and do not license

polarity items. This distributive similarity strongly suggests that WH-*the hell* phrases are polarity items.

Assuming that such phrases are not presuppositional or veridical, they claim that these phrases are polarity items like *any*, which need to be bound by an operator. They specifically assume that these phrases move to [Spec, FP] located above IP and get bound by the nonveridical Q-operator in the CP domain. Thus (10a) has the structure in (10b):

- (10) a. Who the hell bought that book?
 b. $[_{CP} C_Q [_{FocP} [who\ the\ hell]_i [_{Foc} [_{TP} t_i\ bought\ that\ book]]]]$
 (Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 47))

In the foregoing subsections let us see how their analysis handles the behavior of such phrases.

2.1 The Incompatibility with Which

As seen in the previous section, the word *which* is not compatible with *the hell*. *Which* is presuppositional and veridical, and it generally seeks a value strictly from a contextually defined set provided by previous discourse. WH-*the hell* phrases differ in this point because they are not presuppositional or veridical and they extend the domain of quantification to include both familiar and novel values. This is the source of the degraded status of (1b). Pretty much the same thing is suggested about *any* by Kadmon and Landman (1993), who employ the term *widening*. This similarity seems to call for treating WH-*the hell* phrases as polarity items.

2.2 The Failure to Remain in-Situ

As observed in the previous section, WH-*the hell* phrase cannot remain in-situ. Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002) offer a way to derive this effect from a condition on polarity items. It is independently pointed out in the literature (for instance, Linebarger (1980), Beck (1996), Pesetsky (2000)) that no scope bearing element may intervene a polarity item and its licenser, which is often referred to as an intervention effect. Consider the following:

- (11) a. John didn't give Mary *a red cent*.
 b. *John didn't give **every charity** *a red cent*.
 (Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 56))

(11a) is fine, but (11b) is not, because *every charity*, which is a scope bearing

element, intervenes between the polarity item *a red cent* and its licenser *-n't*, which is widely referred to as an intervention effect. The question in (11b) is assumed to involve the structure in (12):

- (12) * [Neg... [**every charity** ... [a red cent ...]]]
 (Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 56))

Similarly, the question in (2b), repeated here as (13a), can be assumed to involve the structure in (13b):

- (13) a. *Who caught what the hell?
 b. * [Q ... [**who**... [who the hell...]]]
 (Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 56))

In (13b) the WH-phrase *who* acts as the harmful intervenor between the operator and the polarity item (*who the hell*, in this case), just like *every charity* in (12a).

This is pretty much how Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002) cover the peculiarities of WH-*the hell* phrases. In the next section we deal with another type of WH-element which can be regarded as a polarity item.

3. WH-If Any

In the previous section we have seen Den Dikken and Giannakidou's argument that WH-*the hell* phrases are polarity items. In this section I would like to examine another kind of WH-element that can be treated as a polarity item, as in the following:

- (14) a. What, if anything, are you going to tell him?
 (Yasui (1982: 47))
 b. And if today's findings cause alarm, what, if anything, can be done?
 (Tanaka (1997: 92))
 (15) a. What, if anything, did you buy last night?
 b. Who, if anyone, called John yesterday?

In these examples, the WH-phrases are followed by *if anything* or *if anyone*. Due to the presence of *any*, these questions can only be taken to imply that the speakers who ask them are not certain whether the event of buying an item or calling John actually took place or not. Thus it must be that the WH-phrases involved here are not presuppositional or veridical, just like WH-*the hell* phrases. Given this, it is not surprising that WH-*if any* is not tolerated in the complement clause selected by a

veridical predicate like *know*, unless the predicate is negated.

- (16) a. *I know what, if anything, you bought last night.
b. I don't know what, if anything, you bought last night.
(17) a. *I know who, if anyone, called John yesterday.
b. I don't know who, if anyone, called John yesterday.

The contrasts above strongly suggest that WH-*if any* (or, more precisely, the WH-phrase accompanied by *if any*) should be treated as polarity items on a par with WH-*the hell*. In the following, let us see whether they behave exactly like WH-*the hell* phrases.

3.1 The Compatibility with Which

WH-*the hell* phrases are incompatible with *which*, as we have seen. Under the approach which regards them as polarity items, a natural expectation would be that WH-*if any* cannot go together with *which*, either. Observe the following:

- (18) Which, if any, of the following presents would you most like to receive at Christmas?
(Tanaka (1997: 90))
(19) a. Which item, if anything, did you buy last night?
b. Which, if any, item did you buy last night?
(20) a. Which guy, if anyone, called John last night?
b. Which, if any, guy called John last night?

Contrary to the expectation, these examples are fine. WH-*if any* sequences are undoubtedly nonpresuppositional and nonveridical, but they can cooccur with *which*. Thus the analysis of WH-*the hell* phrases as polarity items cannot seem to extend to their incompatibility with *which*.^[2]

3.2 The Possibility of Remaining in Situ

WH-*the hell* phrases are unable to stay in situ, so it is expected under Den Dikken and Giannakidou's view that WH-*if any*, which is nonpresuppositional and nonveridical on a par with WH-*the hell*, cannot remain in situ, as a result of failing to satisfy the condition on polarity items. Let us see if this so:

- (21) a. Who bought what, if anything?
b. Where did you meet who, if anyone?

- (22) Who, if anyone, remembers where, if anywhere, we bought which, if any, books?
(Bolinger (1978: 126))

As these examples show, WH-*if any* sequences are allowed to be in situ. From this it follows that the failure of WH-*the hell* phrases to remain in situ has nothing to do with whether they are polarity items or not.

4. A Consideration

What has been seen in the previous section tells us that WH-*if any*, which is nonpresuppositional and nonveridical, does not share two major peculiarities of WH-*the hell*. The distributional differences observed thus suggest that these two types of WH-elements are in fact virtually unrelated to each other. This casts doubt on Den Dikken and Giannakidou's original insight that WH-*the hell* phrases should be regarded as polarity items. The question in this section is, are WH-*the hell* phrases really qualified to be treated as polarity items?

WH-*the hell* phrases have been assumed to be nonpresuppositional so far. Den Dikken and Giannakidou motivate this from the observation that appropriate candidates of answers for them are completely unknown to the speaker who asks questions which involve them. The situation seems to be quite similar in the case of WH-*if any* as well.

I would like to claim, however, that these two WH-elements are quite different from each other with respect to presuppositionality. Consider the following two questions:

- (23) a. What the hell did John buy?
b. What, if anything, did you buy?

These two questions differ from each other concerning the situations in which they can be uttered. In normal circumstances, the speaker who employs (23a) as a question is certain that John actually bought something^{[3],[4]} but is totally at a loss for items which he might have bought, a situation which is so surprising, confusing, or frustrating that he or she may well want to curse. The question in (23b) is asked typically in an entirely different context, where the speaker is not sure in the first place about whether John really bought something or not. This contextual difference can be made clear, as in the following:

- (24) a. I know John bought something, but what the hell did he buy?
b. *I know John bought something, but what, if anything, did he buy?

Each of the questions in (24) is preceded by the sentence which ensures the presupposition that John bought something. The former question, which involves *what the hell*, is fine, but the latter is unacceptable because it sounds contradictory, with the speaker first presupposing John having bought something and denying it immediately after saying it. One more situation that shows the presuppositional difference between these two kinds of questions concerns the following contrast:

- (25) a. Where the hell were you born?
b. *Where, if anywhere, were you born?

The speaker uttering (25a) presupposes that the person that he/she addresses was born somewhere, so the question is fine. The latter question, on the other hand, is anomalous in normal circumstances, since the speaker does not presuppose so, taking into consideration the unrealistic or supernatural possibility that the hearer was not born anywhere.

Thus the consideration here shows that contrary to Den Dikken and Giannakidou's suggestion, WH-*the hell* phrases are in fact presuppositional and they are employed to show the speaker's complete ignorance to candidates for answers. The true nonpresuppositional WH-elements are WH-*if any*. The peculiarities of WH-*the hell* phrases thus have nothing to do with nonpresuppositionality, because they are indeed presuppositional and because the true nonpresuppositional WH-elements, WH-*if any*, do not show such abnormalities, undermining the analysis by Den Dikken and Giannakidou.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued, by utilizing the behavior of WH-*if any* questions, that WH-*the hell* phrases should not be treated as polarity items, because they are indeed presuppositional, contrary to Den Dikken and Giannakidou's claim. Their odd behavior should be accounted for in some other way, a task I will have to leave for future research for now.

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Notes

- [1] See Ausín (1999) who examines the exact opposite cases, where existential quantifiers such as *someone* and *something* can function as WH-phrases, which can be taken as indirect evidence for the view in the text.
- [2] Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002) assume that WH-*the hell* phrases and *any*

extend the domain of quantification to include novel values, but the domain which *any* qualifies over can be restricted to a contextually provided set:

- (i) a. I didn't like any of the movies.
- b. Do you like any of the characters?

The fine status of the above examples suggest that the attempt to treat WH-*the hell* on a par with *any* does not seem to be promising.

- [3] Szabolcsi and Zwarts (1993) also claim that WH-*the hell* phrases are presuppositional. They observe that the contexts where the following two questions are usable are not the same:

- (i) a. Who saw John on the way home?
- b. Who the hell saw John on the way home?

(Szabolcsi and Zwarts (1993: 261))

The (a) question can be answered by "No one," which shows that the presupposition that someone saw John can be denied, but the (b) question can only be asked if the speaker has the undeniable evidence that someone saw John.

- [4] One more thing concerning the presuppositionality of WH-*the hell* phrases that is worth mentioning is the following set of questions:

- (i) a. *Who the hell did anyone see?

(Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 36), taken from Lee (1994))

- b. *Why did anybody help us?

(Den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002: 47))

These questions are both unacceptable. As for the (a) question, Den Dikken and Giannakidou argue that it is bad because it violates the condition on polarity items. The (b) question is bad as well, which is suggested to them by Richard Kayne. They argue that it is bad because it presupposes that somebody did indeed help us, which is a veridical inference and goes against the nonveridical nature of *anybody*. With this in mind, let us return to the (a) question. Suppose, as claimed in the text and in Szabolcsi and Zwarts (1993), that phrases like *who the hell* are presuppositional. Then the presupposition would be that there is indeed someone who was seen by someone, which contradicts the nonpresuppositional character of the subject *anyone*, hence the deviance. Thus, the degraded status of the (a) question does not necessarily support Den Dikken and Giannakidou's approach to WH-*the hell* phrases, but it can be interpreted as evidence for the treatment presented in the text.

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研究課題 生成文法における、例外的な振る舞いをする WH 表現（理由を表す副詞句、

WH-the Hell 句など) を伴う WH 疑問文の研究
研究先および指導教授 メリーランド大学 ハワード・ラズニック ユニバーシティ・
ディステイングイッシュュトプロフェッサー

[抄 録]

本論考では、Den Dikken and Ginnakidou (2002) による、*what the hell* などの WH-*the hell* 句を *any* のような極性項目としてとらえる分析を経験的観点から批判した。その際に、*any* を明示的に含む *what if anything* などの疑問表現を用いた。WH-*the hell* 句には、*which* と共起できない、元位置に残留できない、などの制限があるが、極性項目を伴う WH-*if any* にはそのような制限がないことを示し、また、両者の使われうる文脈を前提性 (presuppositionality) の観点から考察し、前者を極性項目として扱うことには問題があると論じた。